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SUBJECT: BRV HAILS PARAGUAYAN ELECTION OF LUGO

REF: ASUNCION 000236

Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) lauded the April 20 election of Fernando Lugo as Paraguay's next president. The BRV has tried to re-package Lugo's victory to assert that "Bolivarianism is on the march." In his congratulatory message to Lugo, Chavez cited "the common struggles of their two peoples" as a basis to work together in building UNASUR, Chavez' Bolivarian vision of a Union of South American Nations. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Pro-government daily "VEA" declared the recent Paraguayan election a triumph that strengthens Latin American integration. The tabloid's front page displayed a map with the smiling faces of nine leftist leaders (Peru and Colombia were not included). Inside, "VEA's" editorial cartoon showed happy Venezuelans declaring that "Bolivar's sword is marching on." The paper's profile of Lugo's political career headlined that the ex-bishop "knocked down Paraguay's oligarchy." The feature stressed Lugo's confrontation with the Catholic Church over his political activities, but omitted his request for forgiveness for causing the Church "such pain."

¶3. (SBU) The BRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an April 20 communiquQ of Chavez' congratulatory call to Lugo, in which Chavez recognized the "democratic journey " and the "political maturity" of his Paraguayan brothers. Chavez also expressed his admiration for Marshal Francisco Solano Lopez, Paraguay's 19th century war leader. Chavez reportedly closed the conversation by pledging Venezuela's desire to work together in the shared development of both their peoples. Sandra Oblitas, one of five rectors of Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE), and who also served as an election observer in Paraguay, congratulated Paraguay's electoral body for "clear and transparent" reporting.

¶4. (C) Comment: The BRV's reaction to Lugo's victory does not refer to any domestic factors that contributed to Lugo's victory (Reftel). Nevertheless, attempts by Chavez and the BRV's propaganda machine to paint it as part of a greater Bolivarian movement will likely generate little traction in Venezuela given growing public discontent over domestic issues like crime and inflation. Interestingly, Chavez, already widely criticized for his foreign assistance largesse, did not immediately pledge money or development projects for Paraguay's new government. End Comment.

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